

New Haven, Hartford, Springfield Commuter Rail Study
Third Steering Committee Meeting

October 16, 2003 – 2:30 P.M.

Greater Hartford Transit, Union Station, Hartford, CT

The third steering committee meeting began with an introduction by Len Lapsis of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT). He thanked everyone for coming and explained that he was the new project manager upon Rich Hollis's retirement.

Justin Fox of Wilbur Smith Associates (WSA) then began the presentation with an explanation of the revised results for the minimum build scenario. The scenario would have 30-35 minute nominal headway peak hour service only, supplemented by Amtrak trains midday. Stations assume those used by Amtrak today plus New Haven State Street. No additional tracks are proposed and the only station improvements are a minimal amount of parking. The service would require four train sets to make 12 one-way trips. However, a high degree of schedule adherence is necessary. Ridership is estimated at 1800 daily trips plus Amtrak trips. With a similar fare structure to Shore Line East, the revenue is estimated at \$3,400 per day (\$0.9 million annually). Capital costs are \$80 million and operating costs are \$7.1 million per year. The operating deficit would be \$6.2 million per year, equating to a 12.3% farebox recovery rate and a subsidy of \$13.80 per passenger. This scenario requires a very high degree of schedule adherence and it is believed that it would only work with additional second track segments.

Drew Galloway of Amtrak stated that the minimum build scenario as described would not be acceptable to Amtrak without the inclusion of additional track improvements. He also noted that development of all scenarios in the report should be considered for comparative purposes only. While Amtrak is satisfied with the level of analysis performed for this study, any scenarios that are recommended for implementation will be undertaken through separate, more detailed operations and engineering analysis and development of accompanying access and operating agreements. He recommended maintaining a fairly large contingency in the unit costs until more detailed estimates can be developed.

Kari Watkins of WSA continued the presentation with an explanation of the maximum build scenario results. The maximum build includes all existing stations plus a North Haven / Hamden station, Wharton Brook Station at the Pratt & Whitney site, Newington station, North Meadows station, Bradley Airport Station, Enfield Station and South Springfield Station at State Street. Service would be every 15 minutes in the peak hours and hourly off-peak. Improvements would include high level platforms, grade separated pedestrian crossings at each station, enclosed heated station buildings, substantial additional parking and double tracking of the entire line. Three connections to the airport were considered from Windsor Locks station including the Suffield Industrial rail spur, the Route 20 median and a shuttle bus. The maximum build includes the rail spur. Ridership is estimated at 5000 daily trips including Amtrak trips except the Vermonter. Weekend ridership would add an additional 2000 trips. The revenue is estimated at

\$13,000 per day (\$3.2 million annually). Capital costs are \$481 million and operating costs are \$48.3 million per year. The operating deficit would be \$44.7 million per year, equating to a 7.5% farebox recovery rate and a subsidy of \$32.56 per passenger. Breakdowns of ridership by station and capital cost components were also displayed. The 15 minute headways in this scenario affect not only the operating cost, but also contribute to the substantial capital cost.

Drew Galloway (Amtrak) asked about grade-separated rail crossings. He noted that a train every 15 minutes in the peak hour is a lot of gate down time and could cause significant congestion. Tim Sorenson responded that the scenario does not include grade-separating any additional crossings. Most of the ones that could be easily constructed have already been done and the cost and impacts for the remaining crossings would be substantial. A number of crossings were already being taken out however, especially in Meriden.

Russ St. John of Providence & Worcester RR (P&W) asked about sharing the cost of capital improvements with Amtrak since the state would essentially be putting \$481 million into their rail line. Tim Sorenson responded that the purchase of the rail line could still be negotiated and that capital improvements of this type are typically made by the state rather than Amtrak.

James Boice of ConnDOT asked about a potential Legislative Office Building station. Kari Watkins explained that due to the length of the train, it was relatively inefficient to stop in two locations so close together. Unfortunately even with an LOB station, you would still have to walk to the capital building because of the location of the rail line. There is a sidewalk linking both the LOB garage and the capital building with Union Station. It was emphasized that the walk connection between the buildings should be improved.

Tim Sorenson then continued the presentation with a comparison of the minimum and maximum scenarios ridership, operating and capital costs. He then began a discussion about which components of the two scenarios should be carried through to the implementation plan.

A member of the Steering Committee asked if there are bus connections to the stations. Kari Watkins responded that in the maximum build, a significant revamping of the routes near stations was undertaken to better circulate passengers. The minimum build only includes existing bus service.

Another member of the Steering Committee asked about sharing of funding indicating that most of the towns and cities would prefer we build the maximum build because it benefits them. Tim Sorenson responded that some of the funding may come from the towns, especially in station areas. For all federal New Starts projects, 50% of the funds must come from a local/state match.

Rick Porth from the Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) indicated that he disagrees that the towns would want to spend the maximum. He feels that we need workable plan with a few cut-backs from the maximum build. For example, he feels 15 minute peak hour headways is too much service on the line.

Tim Doherty from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) also spoke about wanting a scenario closer to the minimum build. He agreed that 15 minute service is too much and thought that we should hold off on the airport rail connection.

Fred Riese of Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) mentioned that only double tracking certain segments of the line could lower not only the double tracking, but also the bridge costs if the locations were carefully selected to avoid expensive bridges. He also indicated that a mid-range alternative would help balance the two extremes already presented.

Russ St. John (P&W) commented that we need to rebuild the platforms as high-level. That should be left in the plan to make sure they are uniform and user-friendly. Drew Galloway of Amtrak responded that the high-level platforms don't work with freight trains because of the width. Amtrak is statutorily required to provide clearance routes for all of its lines. The cost of gauntlets to get freight around the station areas makes the track a single track when freight is passing through and adds to the capital cost.

Jean Stimolo of Rideworks asked why no new parking was included at the stations in New Haven, Hartford and Springfield. Tim Sorenson responded that these were considered destination stations and that anyone originating from them would either use bus service or pay to park. Kari Watkins added that with the connection to Metro North, the study team even expects that some commuters that currently drive to New Haven to take the train would no longer need to, thus opening up parking at Union Station. Ms. Stimolo commented that she would like to see new parking at all stations, including city ones.

Roger Alsbaugh from the Town of Enfield asked if it was possible to quantify the economic benefits of the rail corridor. He feels this would give support for the maximum build and is afraid that if some of the elements were cut then there would be no economic benefit. Justin Fox responded that it is certainly possible to quantify the accident savings, VMT savings, and environmental impacts.

Karyn Gilvarg of the City of New Haven suggested that at the very least, the team could create a list of economic benefits associated with the service. She went on to say that the final document should include land use planning statements by towns to show support for station area development. Mr. Sorenson pointed out that although Transit-oriented-development can not be included to get higher ridership predictions, station area development would increase ridership on the line and such statements are looked upon favorably by FTA.

A member of the Steering Committee asked about Bradley Airport paying for the potential airport connection. Kevin Lynch of ConnDOT Bureau of Aviation and Ports said that the airport prefers the shuttle bus for now, but will continue to look at the rail connection for the long term in the Master Plan, as well as within the airport area as either light rail or heavy rail.

Another member of the committee asked if discussion were ongoing with the freight operators. Tim Sorenson responded that we were meeting with two of them the next day to get their input.

Roger Alsbaugh (Enfield) asked about the low 7.5% farebox recovery and recommended looking at a full subsidy since the revenues are minimal anyway. He asked what a free service would do for ridership. Mr. Sorenson responded that we could definitely run the service for free for the first couple months, but continuing to do so would get into equity issues with the Shore Line East and Metro North service.

Karyn Gilvarg (New Haven) asked about the cost per mile of auto use that is subsidized by the state. Mr. Sorenson responded that we can probably get these sort of calculations to support the project and that auto-use is subsidized through roadway construction and maintenance as well as environmental costs from increased pollution.

Rick Porth (CRCOG) commented that although we would like to get as close to the maximum build as possible, we should look at a step back for it right now. 30 minute service would be a good start. If the service was done well, then ridership would come and it could be increased later. In terms of capital costs, we need to zero in on a middle ground.

Tim Brennen (PVPC) emphasized the importance of keeping the capital and operating costs separate and to look at the airport as a modular component that can be taken out.

Jean Stimolo (Rideworks) asked what creates all the added riders for New Haven, Hartford, and Springfield in the minimum versus maximum scenarios since these stations are essentially unchanged. Ms. Watkins responded that these are destination stations, so adding other stations and more frequent service increases the riders going to these stations.

Judy Gott from the South Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG) asked if Amtrak and ConnDOT are looking at any other areas for cooperation. Drew Galloway responded that Amtrak is present at the meeting because there is good reason to believe developing this corridor makes sense in terms of both intercity and commuter rail. He mentioned that a concern with the work to date is that the operating costs are too low. The frequent service schedule would push track repairs to night work and that costs extra money. Because Shore Line East service operates on the busy Northeast Corridor, these cost premiums are already factored into the operating contracts.

Tim Doherty (PVPC) stated that it would be helpful to see other examples of farebox recovery rates of other systems to compare these scenarios to.

A member of the Steering Committee asked about the connection to Shore Line East. Ms. Watkins explained that the service is timed for connections in both directions to Metro North. By having the trains all meet in Union Station at the same time, commuters could connect between all three services.

Another member asked whether parking would be free. Tim Sorenson responded that you would pay in New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, but other stations would be free.

Mr. Sorenson then summarized the discussion that the committee feels that we should cut back on the headways and leave the capital costs for the elements as pieces of a puzzle to be added together. The committee feels that an enhanced minimum build would be a good place to start and as that service proves itself, a higher level of service can be provided. The sense of several committee members was that both service and capital improvements could be approached incrementally, starting from the minimum build.

Fred Riese (DEP) commented that we need to keep the New Haven governance study in mind. There needs to be a standard product, because there is an expectation of uniformity by riders. The stations should all be the same, whatever elements are finally decided on.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:15 pm with some questions and comments addressed on an individual basis. The presentation from the meeting and these minutes will be available at the website www.nhhsrail.com.

Attendance at the meeting included the following committee members and alternates, study team members and other interested parties:

Tim Brennan	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Tim Doherty	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Tom Maziarz	Capitol Region Council of Governments
Richard J. Porth	Capitol Region Council of Governments
Judy E. Gott	South Central Regional Council of Governments
R Warren	Town of Enfield
Roger Alsbaugh	Town of Enfield
Peter Souza	Town of Windsor
James Mahoney	Town of Berlin
Karyn M. Gilvarg	City of New Haven
Fred Riese	Department of Environmental Protection
Phillip Smith	Office of Policy and Management
Russ St. John	Providence & Worcester RR
Drew Galloway	Amtrak
Scott Howland	Amtrak
Michael Sharff	Peter Pan Bus Lines
Jean Stimolo	Rideworks
Charles Barone	Connecticut Department of Transportation
James Boice	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Steve DelPapa	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Paul Dickey	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Kathryn Faraci	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Leonard Lapsis	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Kevin Lynch	ConnDOT, Bureau of Aviation and Ports
Peter Richter	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Carmine Trotta	Connecticut Department of Transportation
Justin Fox	Wilbur Smith Associates
Tim Sorenson	Wilbur Smith Associates
Kari Watkins	Wilbur Smith Associates
Representative James Abrams	
Representative David McCluskey	
Bradshaw Smith	